



## **Ritual Friendships as a Means of Understanding the Cultural Exchanges Between Santal and Hindu Cultures**

Andersen, Peter Birkelund

*Published in:*  
Temenos

*Publication date:*  
1986

*Document version*  
Også kaldet Forlagets PDF

*Citation for published version (APA):*  
Andersen, P. B. (1986). Ritual Friendships as a Means of Understanding the Cultural Exchanges Between Santal and Hindu Cultures. *Temenos*, 22, 7. [14].

PETER B. ANDERSEN

## Ritual Friendships as a Means of Understanding the Cultural Exchanges Between Santal and Hindu Cultures

Although the Santals of India live among the Hindus and appear to have accepted and incorporated many elements of Hinduism, their culture must be considered as distinct from that of the Hindus and other caste-organized groups. The accepted approach has regarded the two neighbouring cultures as impermeable and culturally exclusive; in this paper<sup>1</sup> I wish to break away from this approach, focusing instead on the processes of cultural exchange.

The starting point for my treatise is a brief description of earlier methodological and theoretical approaches to the culture of the Santals. I wish to disprove the traditional conception of Santal culture as static, for it has borrowed many elements, particularly from the surrounding Hindu culture. Santal culture has not lost its ethnic identity in the process, and an approach which takes the dynamic aspects of the culture into consideration is therefore preferable. An analysis of the two types of the Santal institution of ritual friendship, *gate* and *phul*, will provide examples in my description of how cultural exchange can take place. I chose this point of view because cultural exchange very often takes place in a face-to-face situation. In my opinion it is on the personal level that a further understanding of the process of acculturation is to be found.

The Santali language is an important feature in differentiating the Santals from the surrounding groups. Linguistically it belongs to the Kherwarian subgroup of the Mundari languages of Central India. The Hindus speak various Indo-European languages, and a few other surrounding groups speak various Dravidian languages.

The Santals have been recognized as a separate ethnic group since the end of the 18th century. At that time they were living in the lower parts of the Chota Nagpur Plateau, on what is now the border between the states of Orissa and Bengal. During the last century the majority of the Santals moved further north to Birbhum and further on to the adjacent areas of Bihar. Here one area assigned to different tribes was even given the name "Santal Parganas", i.e. "Land of the Santal Chiefs". (This name remained in

Articles in TEMENOS are indexed in *Arts and humanities citation index* (Philadelphia), *Bulletin signalétique* 527 (Paris), *Religion index two: multi-author works* (Chicago) and *Science of religion: abstracts and index of recent articles* (Amsterdam).

TEMENOS usually appears once a year. Single volumes may be obtained and subscriptions placed at any bookseller, or at Akateeminen Kirjakauppa (Academic Bookstore) Keskuskatu 1, SF-00100 Helsinki, Finland

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Prof. Dr. Lauri Honko  
Institute of Folklore and Comparative Religion  
University of Turku  
Henrikinkatu 3  
SF-20500 Turku, Finland

Editorial Assistant,  
Hanna Saressalo

official use until 1984, when the area was divided into three separate districts.) As the result of strict suppression in connection with the Santal "Hul" rebellion in 1855, many Santals fled to what is now West Bengal and Bangladesh. Later some moved on even further, to Assam and Chittagong, where they were employed in the tea-plantation programmes.

#### THE NAME SANTAL

The Santals earlier called themselves either *manjhi* or *hor*. *Manjhi* is a word of Indo-European origin and means "chief". It was used mainly as a polite form of address, both by Hindus speaking to Santals and among Santals themselves. *Hor* is the Santali term for "human being" and is common to all Mundari languages. It is still used in everyday speech, i.e. *Hor* for Santal, *Horie* for the Santali language.

The origin of the name "Santal" is still a subject for dispute. Most likely, "Santal" is a corruption of "Saontar", the name of the area "Saont" near Silda in Midnapur District. It is, however, possible that the word "Santal" does not come from Santali but is a name imposed on the Santals by outsiders. Nevertheless, the word is known by the Santals and is incorporated in Santali, and some Santal members of Congress (I) even propagate it as the correct designation for the Santals.

The Santals and other tribal minority groups have created a nationalist movement called "Jharkand". One of its aims is to unite Santal Parganas and Chota Nagpur into a separate constituent state for the tribes.<sup>2</sup> The name "Adibasi", which means "aboriginal", came to serve as a common denominator for all these groups and was already used by the national parties in the 1930s and early 1940s. Since this expression brought on wide-ranging political consequences for the future of the Hindu groups, it was later banned from official use.

#### OFFICIAL REGISTRATION OF THE SANTALS

A general census registration was initiated in 1891, and until 1941 the Santals were registered as either "tribal", "animist" or both. These terms belong to different classification systems. "Tribal" is a social categorization, while "animist" is a religious one, but the two categories were used at random. The source of this rather unsystematic terminology is to be found in 19th century scientific theory, which looked upon society as the result of unilinear evolution in which religion and society followed the same rules and were conceived of as being two aspects of the same whole.

The 1911 census registered the Santals as "tribal animists" or having "a tribal religion", indicating that the Santals were at this time considered to

be representatives of a primordial culture, living among peoples belonging to a superior culture and religion. Santals who became Muslims, Christians or Hindus posed a problem of categorization. Thus it was decided during the preparation of the census of 1941 to avoid religion as a direct means of classification, introducing the term "scheduling" instead. This category was chosen to designate certain depressed groups, as either "scheduled tribes" or "scheduled castes". But since religion was still kept as an indirect means of classification, it happened that the Santals were a "tribe", and some Santals were even "scheduled tribals", while Santals who were Buddhists or Christians were never registered as "scheduled". A further problem with the 1941 census originated from the fact that the different constituent states were independent census units, who could use their own different criteria as a basis for the registration of "scheduled tribes and castes". As a result, Santals were registered differently according to where they lived. In Bihar, for example, they were "scheduled tribals", but in Bengal only "tribals".<sup>3</sup>

With the census of 1951, the system of classification was revised, which meant that all Santals, regardless of their religious affiliation, were classified as "scheduled tribals". But this terminology has its problems too, since the most obvious difference between Santals and Hindus is in fact their religion. Differences in material culture do not distinguish "tribals" from "scheduled caste peoples". I therefore prefer to avoid the term "tribal" when dealing with Santals and Santal community.

#### THEORIES DEALING WITH THE INTERACTION BETWEEN SANTAL AND HINDU SOCIETY

A clear parallel can be observed between the administrative categorization of the Santals and the older ethnographic descriptions. Both descriptive systems are based upon contemporary theory and political bias. Ethnographers tend to approach Santal society as if it were either isolated from the surrounding Hindu society or undergoing a rapid process of assimilation into Hinduism. The different approaches and the influence of these approaches on researchers' views of Santal culture can be illustrated by the many different ways in which researchers have dealt with the Santal god Thakur.

The oldest concept of Thakur is that of the first Santal god: When Christian missionaries in the I.H.M.S. (later the N.E.L.C.) began their work in around 1879, they characterized the Santal religion as the "worship of evil spirits". The missionaries searched among the spirits and found one that resembled the (good) Christian God: "the god Thakur". Consequently, on the basis of the fundamental ethnographic research by the missionaries Skrefsrud and Boddling,<sup>4</sup> Thakur came to be accepted as "the good God of the Santals". Pater Wilhelm Schmidt, among others,

treated "the good God of the Santals" in a similar way. He viewed this god as an example of the "Urmonotheismus" of which he believed traces could be found everywhere on earth. According to his theory this concept should therefore go back to the beginning of time and have its origins in an unchangeable Santal culture. From this point of view, the results of the early missionaries with respect to the aboriginality of Santal culture thus coincide with the terminology of the older censuses.

Others, however, have regarded Thakur as belonging to the deities of Hinduism, and from there adopted into Santal religion. This point of view was voiced as early as 1891 by Risley, and later in a broader theoretical context by G. S. Ghurye. Ghurye attempted to show that the "aboriginal", non-Hindu ethnic groups of India were so strongly influenced by Hinduism that they could hardly be viewed as separate cultural entities. He also argued that the *panchayet* institution (the village council), as well as farming, the economic foundation of Santal society, were taken over from Hindu culture. On the other hand, the method of Ghurye results in the isolation of the various institutions from their integrated place in the cultural environment, neglecting, among other things, the cultural identity and self-image of the Santals.

N. Datta-Majumdar used a somewhat different approach when he studied cultural change among the Santals in the 1940s. He took the view that cultures are in a state of constant change, because of both external influences and internal dynamics. To him Santal culture and Hindu culture were still autonomous cultures regardless of their mutual cultural exchange. In order to see the cultural change taking place in his time more clearly, Datta-Majumdar used a model of a hypothetical "traditional Santal culture" as a methodological tool. By this means he tried to identify new traits, concentrating on cultural change. The question of whether some "old traits" in the "traditional Santal culture" were original Santal traits or possible loans from Hindu culture lay beyond Datta-Majumdar's interest. Datta-Majumdar's approach thus made many of the elements which Ghurye regards as Hindu integral in Santal culture, thereby ignoring their *history*.

The advantage of Datta-Majumdar's approach is that it includes both internal and external stimuli of change, accounting for the reinterpretation and adaptation of external stimuli by Santal culture. In this way his conceptual framework permits an extensive dynamic interpretation of change. The particular weaknesses of the approach were pointed out by V. Kochar in 1970, who claimed that Datta-Majumdar's interpretation places too little emphasis on the traditional Santal institutions in relation to the borrowed Hindu elements.

Kochar and Datta-Majumdar worked in the same locality in Bihar, but they arrived at widely different conclusions in their concepts of Santal culture. These differences can be traced to the highly different approaches

and problem-orientations of each author. Whereas Kochar chose to regard Santal culture as static and unchangeable, Datta-Majumdar concentrated in particular on Hindu elements which had at some point in history been taken over from Hindu culture. With this approach Santal culture stands out as extremely strongly Hindu-influenced, without any "genuine" Santal foundation.

Discussions of this kind may seem rather fruitless — societies do change. The most interesting problem in connection with Santal culture is whether it can be regarded by its own carriers as integrated into Hindu culture or whether it is conceived of as an independent culture.

In the course of a long period of acculturation, Santal culture has taken over elements of foreign origin. These elements have, however, been reinterpreted and adapted to Santal culture, so that it must still be considered a distinct and independent culture in accordance with the Santals' own conception of themselves. It is therefore most reasonable to accept the people who consider themselves to be Santals as Santals, and the culture they bear as the Santal culture. It might be added that this has been the policy of the censuses since 1951, as seen above. The differences which occur must then be treated as *internal* variances, and not as various foreign elements.

Of interest to scholarship now is an examination of how such change and adaption take place. Since the mid-1960s researchers have been attempting precisely this: to view Santal culture in the light of the Santals' consciousness of their own ethnic identity. Observers have concentrated on the political and religious organization of the Santals and their adaption to the surrounding Hindu society. These researchers have been particularly inspired by the concept of "Sanskritization", a concept created by the great Indian anthropologist Srinivas under the influence of the American sociologists Redfield and Singer and their works on "the great and the little tradition".

In the development of these concepts in India the emphasis has been on the psychological motivation of low-status groups to imitate high-status groups. Researchers using this approach have studied the Santals' organized adoption of elements of high-caste Hindu culture, explaining this by the hypothesis that the Santals felt psychologically inferior to the Hindus and therefore chose to imitate them. This view gives a possible explanation of why the Santals have been able to preserve their culture and religion, even when taking over foreign elements. This is contrary to the theories of Redfield, Singer and Srinivas, who were interested in how foreign elements are assimilated by a dominated culture. Their studies of the Santals for the most part dealt with the psychological mechanisms which have kept up the "little tradition" of the Santals. The titles of some of the publications of this school of research speak for themselves: "A Tribe in Search of a Great Tradition",<sup>5</sup> and "The Santalization of the Santals".<sup>6</sup> As expressed by



Gautam, "(...) confronted with the practical conditions of interdependence, (the Santals) avoid any possible allegiance to a single group and tend to unite against external fears. Thus, in practice, external relations do not affect their traditional thinking and living conditions, but rather become a strong unifying factor."<sup>7</sup>

The minority group, it appears, is held together by one single psychological factor, namely the "common fear" of its members. This explanation presupposes that all Santals react in the same way to Hindu culture, neglecting the social differences which actually exist in Santal culture. These methodological objections can be illustrated by the study of Mahapatra<sup>8</sup> dealing with the Santals of Majurhan, a former kingdom which was made into a district of the Indian constituent state of Orissa in 1949. As a result of this incorporation a new type of Santal leader emerged: leaders who were no longer sanctioned solely by the traditional village council but worked inside the national political system. They worked to adapt Santal culture to the majority culture of the Hindus, wishing to improve the social position of the Santals with respect to the Hindus. For example, the new leaders emphasized higher education, the creation of a distinct Santali literature, and a modification of the drinking customs, a trait closely related to traditional Santal festivity. These new efforts were not all welcomed by the traditional leaders and periodically met direct opposition. Of significance here is the fact that different Santals, depending on their social status, have reacted very differently to acculturation. It is therefore impossible to understand their reactions on the basis of monofactual psychologizing explanations.

The psychological explanation, which is part of the Sanskritization model, cannot, in my opinion, be used on the Santals, because different groups within socially differentiated Santal culture have reacted very differently to acculturation. Rather than dealing with a so-called "common Santal attitude" towards Hindu culture, I shall take a closer look at the actual interaction between Santals and Hindus in the village of Bonsole.

#### BONSOLE: ETHNIC SETUP AND ECONOMIC FOUNDATIONS

In the south-westerly part of Midnapur District in West Bengal, where this material was collected, the Santals make up about one third of the population. The village of Bonsole is situated in this area, only a few kilometers from the borders of Bihar and Orissa, respectively, and the nearest post office is in the village of Sandapura, about two kilometres away. The relationship between Santals and Hindus will be examined below.

The houses in Bonsole are scattered along a village street about one kilometer long. The street is somewhat raised from the adjacent rice-fields,

which are otherwise terraced at a height of approximately two meters above the village level itself. Bonsole has about 55 joint households, making a total of about 900 Santals. Furthermore there are about 70 Hindus, divided into three jatis: one family of Kamars (blacksmiths), two families of Kayastas (scribes), and seven or eight families of Dom (sweepers). A common marketplace is situated westward, marking the border between Bonsole and Khendapara, the adjoining Hindu village, populated by Kumbaker (potters). Looking towards Bonsole, on the Bonsole side of the marketplace, live the Kamar (the blacksmith) and a few unlanded Santal families. The marketplace is connected to the rest of the village by a secondary road, which becomes the village street of Bonsole. The Santals live along this street, their houses are placed according to family and clan, landed and unlanded Santals living side by side. The houses of the Dom-families (sweepers) are gathered along the byroad/village street half way between the marketplace and the Santal houses. The Kayastas (scribes) live right at the edge of the Santal area.

The economic foundation of the Santals of Bonsole is the cultivation of rice, and almost all the land is owned by them. Many Santals add to their income from farming by working outside the village as craftsmen. Others seek public employment, which they can secure easily because of their status as members of a scheduled tribe. In this way many men have jobs far away from the village, and are consequently at home for only a few months of the year. Thus the family households are often maintained by the women and the older sons. Among the Hindus only one of the Kayastas families owns land, and the men of both families work in government offices. The Kamar (blacksmith) has his workshop next to his house, and in addition to the market in Bonsole, he also visits the various other markets in the area. The Dom (sweepers) live by wickerwork, and some of them are rickshawmen as well.

In their work the Santals often come in close contact with other Indians, and in Midnapur District almost all Santals speak Bengali as a second language. Hindus, however, rarely learn Santali. Thus as a general rule it is the Santals who learn the languages as well as the other cultural standards necessary for free movement among other Indians. In Bonsole, however, some of the Hindus have learned Santali, namely men from the Kayastas and Kamar families. Among the Dom a knowledge of Santali is not so extensive. Hindu women have no knowledge of Santali in spite of their residence in and connections with life in Bonsole. This difference between Hindu men and women is most likely due to the fact that for men a knowledge of Santali is required in trade and work.

Another point of differentiation between the Santals and the Hindus is the decoration of their houses. Santal houses are painted with earthen colours in two or three broad horizontal stripes. The floors and base are dark grey, the walls are ochre-red, yellow or white. In contrast the Hindus

leave the clay walls of their houses unpainted, though the women sometimes decorate them with Devali patterns, white ornaments, ritually applied. The house of the Kamar is an exception to this rule; he paints his house in the same way as the Santals.

The eating habits of the different groups are another socially differentiating factor. The Santals eat the meat of several types of animals, both male and female, while for the Hindus most meats are taboo. Neither Santals nor Hindus eat beef or pork, but all groups may eat goat, though the *jati*-relation determines whether, for instance, the meat of a she-goat may be eaten.

#### THE VILLAGE COUNCIL

Bonsole is governed by a village council. Village- and caste-councils are important institutions throughout India. Normally they are called *panchayat*, which means 'five-men-council', but they can be composed according to various different principles. The members of caste- and village-councils may to a certain degree overlap, so that often the council of the dominating group makes up the village council. In these cases the sphere of authority of the village council does not include the 'private' matters of the other councils. The Santals call their village council *panchayat* or *more bor* (five men). *More bor* may refer both to the members of the sitting village council, and at the same time to all adult male Santals in the village, as they all have the same opportunity to influence the outcome of the meeting. The offices of the village council of Bonsole can be inherited within the same family. The conduct of the council members is pro forma evaluated by the assembly of men during a ritual (*magh sim*), in the month of January.

In Bonsole the *more bor* includes the following offices: *manji* (the chief), *jog manjhi* (the assistant chief), *paranik* ('chieftrain'), two *godekein* (criers), and *naik* (the priest). The greatest influence is wielded by the *manjhi* and *jog manjhi*. They settle quarrels, supervise the meeting out of land, and conduct negotiations with other villages. Marriage negotiations also comprise a substantial part of their work; these are negotiations which are often conducted between villages. The *jog manjhi* is also responsible for the supervision of unmarried young men and their various rites of passage. *Naik* is, as mentioned, a member of the *more bor*, but he participates in political decisions only to a limited extent. His tasks inside the *more bor* are confined to the conducting of sacrifices. In these rituals he is the leader, assisted by the other members of the *more bor*. His most extensive task is to conduct the rituals which take place in the grove, *jaber*, located at the edge of the village. The rituals concentrate on the *bongas*, who live in *jaber*. They are assumed to live in stones placed at the foot of the trees of the *jaber*.

The *jaber bongas* are one of the many different species of *bonga* that can

be found in the religion of the Santals. The word *bonga* is most often translated as 'spirit'. The concept of *bonga* does, however, comprise meanings that are incompatible with this translation. Most important, *bongas* are activated through rituals alone. Conducting these rituals is called to 'bonga' (*bongaa*), which is *bonga* used as a verb. In this usage the expression must be translated as to 'sacrifice', 'take oracles', etc., depending on the kind of ritual. The basic difference between the *jaber bongas* and other *bongas* is marked by the rituals and the way in which their sacrificial animals are treated. The sacrificial animals of the *jaber bongas* are killed by *naik* (the priest), who cuts off their heads, causing the blood to run over the altars of the *bongas* (the stones). This treatment is called to *bongaa*. In other *bonga* rituals the animals are slaughtered in such a way that the blood remains in the body, a form of sacrifice called *kantamea* (to 'slaughter').

The *bongas* are connected to places and social groups, from where they are irremovable. 'House *bongas*' (*orak' bongas*), for instance, are connected to houses and are to some degree identified with the forefathers (*bapramko*) of their respective houses. These *bongas* are usually beneficial to the family. If a strange *bonga* should intrude, the family will fall ill, especially the master of the house, who takes care of the 'house *bonga*' rituals. This idea is the root of an apotropaic ritual, always connected with weddings. With this ritual an attempt is made to stop the bride's *orak' bongaa* from following her to the new home. If it does follow, it becomes the dangerous *naibar bongaa* (father-in-law-*bonga*).

The danger of strange *bongas* is also reflected in the way *sima bongas* are dealt with. *Sima* means borderline and the rituals of the *sima bongas* take place at the village boundary stones, where they are supposed to dwell. Here they are offered sacrifices to keep them out of the village itself. Should they come in, it is believed this would cause an epidemic.

The Santals of Bonsole constitute one closed ritual unit, comprising neither other Santals nor Hindus. That other Santals are conceived of as being closer than Hindus is apparent from the fact that they too are called *bor* (human beings). Furthermore, it is Santals from outside a person's own village with whom he will establish social contacts via the marriage institution. Hindus outside the village, however, are identified with the dangerous *sima* forces surrounding Bonsole.

The Santals call the Hindus *Deko*. They are regarded as different from *bor*, without full status as 'humans' in society. The Santals stress the difference when they describe the *Deko* as *Deko pusi*, 'Hindu cats'. The meaning of *Deko pusi* is 'cheat' or 'swindler', with an overtone of 'ambitious'. Thus *Deko* comprises a line of qualities which the Santals regard as undesirable in their own culture. The Santal attitude towards *Deko* is a result of, among other things, experiences with Hindu moneylenders. The Santals, on the other hand, are outside the accepted Hindu social



system: they eat unclean food, they worship *bongas*, which are perceived as very different from the Hindu *puja*. In short, both in eating and ritual usage, the two groups differ markedly.

The Hindus of Bonsole, therefore, do not involve the village council in their sacrifices and rites of passage, but perform the rituals either inside the family circle, the *jati*, or in cooperation with other *jatis*. Even the landed Kayastas do not take part in the agricultural festivals of the Santals. The Bonsole administration, however, is dominated by the Santals, and the village council acts on behalf of the Hindus towards the municipality, just as they manage the distribution of land and irrigation-rights.

#### COOPERATION BETWEEN SANTALS AND HINDUS

Although the two cultures follow separate traditions, they live as neighbours in Bonsole. Commercially the Santals cooperate with the Dom. Outside Bonsole the slaughtering of goats on the marketplaces is a joint undertaking, inside Bonsole the Santals employ the Dom as farmhands. The presence of the Kamar (the blacksmith) is necessary to agriculture. The Kayastas also own land in the village.

As a consequence of the cooperation it sometimes happens that Santals and Hindus eat together. The food will then always be adapted to the religious prescriptions of the partakers, so that the parties involved do not break any taboos, and the meal most often takes place privately. It should be emphasized, however, that Santals and Hindus can eat together on official occasions. I witnessed this, for example, on the occasion of a party given by the *gram panchayet* (the municipality) after the young unmarried men of Bonsole had finished repairing the village street. The work was carried out under the supervision of one of the Santals of Bonsole, who was also a member of the *gram panchayet* and the *jog manjhi* (assistant chief) of Bonsole, so that it was a mutual undertaking by the village council and the municipality. The young men of the Kayastas *jati* had also participated and were therefore invited to the feast. Hindus from the *gram panchayet* and from Khendapare, the neighbouring village, also participated.

The different Hindu *jatis* in Bonsole are dependent on the Santals in their ritual practices. For instance, neither the Kayastas nor the Dom perform the sacrifice of a goat to the goddess Kali required in the *pujas*. They have to call in Santals to perform this part of the rites, whereas they themselves perform the rest.

Judging from this evidence, the Hindus must be said to have adapted to Santal society. Both parties benefit directly or indirectly from the cross-cultural cooperation. The social norms of each of the groups are mutually adapted in such a way that certain functions cannot be performed by the individual group, so that it is necessary to call in people from the

other groups. However, all the groups seem to take pride in their own profession and culture, and no group seems to feel inferior to any of the others.

The cooperation between the groups is evident on a more institutionalized level by different types of friendship.

#### RITUAL INTEGRATION AND FORMAL FRIENDSHIPS

The interaction between the Santals and the different *jati*-groups is characterized by a network of "formal friendships". This institution has been mentioned in literature dealing with the area, but the social importance of these friendships and their consequences in cultural exchange have not hitherto been taken into consideration. The different institutions of friendship in Bonsole will be analyzed below.

In Bonsole friendships are formed between members of different families on each side. The family is the social constituent of the friendship relation. In everyday life this is apparent from the fact that members of the different families who are connected by ties of ritual friendship greet each other as if they were members of the same nuclear family. In Indian society, where the exchange of greetings is meticulously regulated, this behaviour displays great intimacy. There are, however, two different forms of friendship.

According to one, the obligation is passed down from generation to generation. Thus sons take over their fathers' friends and the sons of these in a theoretically endless line. This kind of friendship is called *gate*, a word which basically means 'friend'.

The second kind of friendship is called *phul*, and lasts only one generation. It is established on the basis of a close friendship between two young people of the same sex, but of course obliges both their families. *Phul* means 'flower' and is translated as 'flower-friend'.

Both *gate*- and *phul*-friends take part in each other's family feasts, especially rites of passage. I have myself had the opportunity to study this institution at various weddings. Among the Santals one type of wedding is called *sagan bapla* (arranged marriage). It is an expensive and demanding marriage-ritual, and in principle the bride and groom are not supposed to know each other beforehand. On the evening of the wedding day, after the bride has been brought to the house of the groom, the *gate*-friends of the family have an opportunity to greet the couple, on this occasion they address the bride for the first time with the terms of kinship they will use from that day. She, in turn, answers in the same way.

*Phul*-friends are only involved in weddings insofar as they are friends of one of the parties. Then they are active in a ritual which takes place the morning after the wedding, called *janga arup* (washing of feet). The

bridegroom is welcomed by the bride and the female members of his own family with a washing of the feet. At the end of this ritual they grasp his ankle, refusing to let go until he pays for his release with small change. If the groom has a *phul*-friend, he will receive the same treatment. *Phul*-friends of the woman take part in this ritual as well.

During some of the yearly festivals people visit their relatives and friends, both *gate* and *phul*. The New Year festivals of the Santals and the Hindus fall at different times of the year, and through these friendships, both groups participate in New Year festivities twice a year.

#### THE SOCIAL MEANING OF FRIENDSHIP

Information on *phul*- and *gate*-friendships is very scarce in the literature on this area. It is, however, apparent that a lack of *gate*-friends demonstrated the low social prestige of a family. The fact that these friendships can transcend ethnic borders is mentioned by Boddling.<sup>9</sup>

In Bonsole there are very few *phul*-friendships. Santals from Bonsole who have *phul*-friends are usually from families who have members in the *panbayet* or are landowners of great influence. The rarity of the institution makes it all the more remarkable that one of the young Kayastas men is the *phul*-friend of a Santal.

The *gate*-institution also seems to exist chiefly among the landed families. Consequently, of the Hindus, only the Kayastas are involved. Among the Santals, too, by far the greatest number of *gate*-friends own land and some of them are closely related to the *manjhi* and the *jog manjhi* (nephew/uncle relation).

*Gate*-friendships outside Bonsole seem to be a prerogative of the *panbayet* members or their relatives. In a sense they represent the village to the outside world, and Hindus are often *gate*-friends in other villages. The friendship can be with the family of the chief or similar influential families or even, more often, with a number of local tradesmen living in the surrounding villages. Thus the more important Santal-families are institutionally connected with Hindus both in Bonsole and in other villages.

#### CONCLUSION

As was apparent from the historical survey at the beginning of this article, analysis of the relationship between Santals and Hindus has been complicated by the fact that the two cultures involved have been seen as homogeneous and static. There has also been a tendency to regard the recorded verbal attitudes as representing the actual state of affairs. As we

have seen, some headway can be made by observing the actual interaction between the two groups.

In the process of acculturation the social structures are redefined. Therefore it is impossible to regard the various groups separately. Furthermore I believe that it is the process of interaction between the groups involved that should be the object of study. It is in this process that cultural exchange takes place. Within the different groups sets of attitudes do exist that emphasize differences and create a selfimage in accordance with the view of the group as static and separate. However, I believe it is necessary to observe the actual facts of everyday life as well.

Therefore, rather than concentrating on the conflicts between the two cultures, I have tried to demonstrate that there is actually a large degree of cultural cooperation in Bonsole. This cooperation appears to be so well-established that it might actually be called a relationship of mutual dependence, maintaining two separate, clearly defined religions and cultures in the same area.

I have attempted to show that there are mainly two levels of cultural organization: the formal leadership and the family sphere. Formal leadership is manifest in the village council. As we have seen, this is dominated by Santals, and the Hindu *jatis* function independently. On the family level, however, there is close cultural cooperation, organized on the basis of the network of Santal ritual friendships. Single Santal families form friendships with Hindu families and vice versa, thereby transcending ethnic borders.

Therefore, in spite of the obvious problems and conflicts arising from the encountering of different cultures, it is important that researchers do not overlook the social processes taking place on the individual or family level which work towards adaption and cooperation.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I wish to thank the Danish Research Council for the Humanities for their financial support of the field research upon which this article is based. I would also like to thank Professor Dr. Asok G. Ghosh, Department of Anthropology, University of Calcutta and Dr. P. N. Hansda, Kodapura who have over the years been of invaluable help in my work. I further thank Mette Grönvold and Susan Petersen for their help in translating the manuscript and Merethe

Sundby-Sørensen, Department of Sociology of Religion, University of Copenhagen for critical comments.

<sup>2</sup> Ghurye 1963, 334-336.

<sup>3</sup> Mithra 1953, 5.

<sup>4</sup> Boddling 1910.

<sup>5</sup> Orans 1965.

<sup>6</sup> Gautam 1977.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid.*, 372.

<sup>8</sup> Mahapatra 1977.

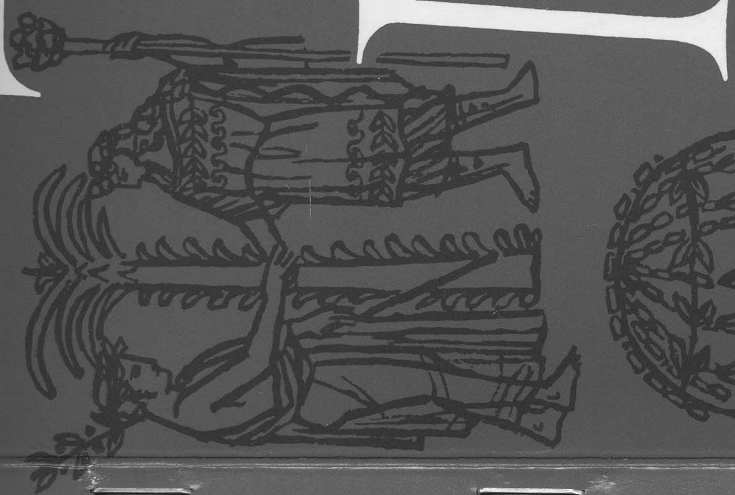
<sup>9</sup> Boddling 1935, 744.



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STUDIES IN COMPARATIVE RELIGION  
PRESENTED BY SCHOLARS IN  
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Vol. 22. 1986

ISSN 0097-1817  
ISBN 951-95235-2-9